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CONFERENCE ON THE TRAINING OF THE MINISTRY AND OTHER RELIGIOUS LEADERS

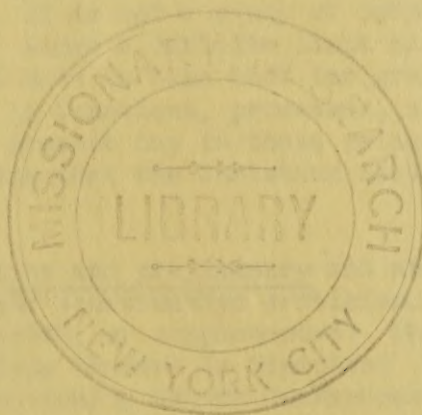
Commission I.

Newark, N. J. , Sept. 24-25, 1935

T H E F U N C T I O N O F T H E M I N I S T R Y  
I N N O N - C H R I S T I A N R E L I G I O N S

THE MINISTRY OF HINDUISM

Daniel J. Fleming



THE INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY COUNCIL  
156 Fifth Avenue  
New York City  
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## Foreword

A conference was held at Newark, N.J., November 30 to December 1, 1934, on "The Training of the Ministry of the Younger Churches." The Foreign Missions Conference, at its meeting in January, 1935, authorized a second conference on the same subject to be held in September, 1935.

As a background for the study of what the Christian minister should be doing and the training he should receive, it has been decided to devote one session of the proposed conference to a study of "The Ministry of the Non-Christian Faiths." Five areas have been selected for consideration, India, China, Japan, the Near East, and Africa - each by a different writer.

The object is to answer as far as possible, within the limit of 5,000 words for each area, such questions as the following:

How do non-Christian religions propagate themselves?  
What are the processes, personal or social, by which they mediate themselves to the oncoming generation?  
How are their customs, ideals, moral practices, and religious views imparted to youth and maintained in adults?  
What ministerial functions are exercised in these religions?  
What in these religions takes the place of the Christian Church, the Church School, pastoral work, and religious education?  
How do these religions serve their constituencies?  
What is the background and training of those who exercise these ministerial functions?

Negatively, in this study one is not primarily interested in the content of these religions. It is not a study of Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Animism, etc. as religions. Since a definite limit has been placed on the study of each area, we shall have to take that for granted. In this series of papers we are interested in functions, processes, ministrations, and training to be found in the present day in these religions for whatever help this may have in understanding what the Christian ministry should take into consideration.

This paper is tentative and preliminary and about one religion only, Hinduism. It is sent for your constructive criticism. At what points can this study be corrected, guarded, or supplemented? What more can be said about the training of religious leaders in Hinduism? This particular Commission, as well as the on-coming Newark Conference, will be grateful for your cooperation in perfecting this brief survey.

Please send your suggestions to

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THE MINISTRY OF HINDUISM

Daniel J. Fleming

Hinduism is a gigantic social and religious structure. Into its framework of caste are built intricate and indefinite religious elements, diverse rites and practices, sublime and degraded sentiments, crude mythologies, and bold philosophical speculations. The ceremonies, practices, and ministrations are so numerous and varied that only an impression can be gained from the following brief survey. The controlling idea in selection has been to give some idea of the services rendered by Hinduism and the ways by which it perpetuates itself from generation to generation. Any account of the modern trend toward secularism, and of the revamping of older forms and beliefs does not come within the scope of this study.

I. INFLUENCES AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE HOME

1. The Mother

Those who know India will realize how close a relationship in spiritual things may exist between an Indian mother and her child. A devout mother in an Indian village where the religious life is simple may remain amid her household affairs and yet pervade them all with the spirit of religion. One hears of those who rise early before dawn to take their ceremonial bath and then carry flower offerings to the temple. Each daily act may be dedicated by custom to God. At the end of the day there is offering of prayer and worship before retiring for rest. There may be fasting for a day, so that the prayer may be more earnest and acceptable. Many a child has the opportunity of watching and imitating such a mother. The Indian child drinks in with his mother's milk and with the very air he breaths much that is to make him a Hindu.

Sadhu Sundar Singh over and over again paid tribute to his mother who was a constant example to him all through his childhood before he became a Christian. He says that every day as a religious duty she used to help some poor person in need. She exercised by far the greatest influence upon his character, and moulded more than any one else his religious life. The Sadhu gives a beautiful picture of the religious training he received from his mother. "My mother," he writes, "used to rise daily before daylight, and after bathing would read the Gita and other Hindu Scriptures. I was influenced more than the rest of the family by her pure life and teaching. She early impressed on me the rule that my first duty on rising in the morning was that I should pray to God for spiritual food and blessing, and that only after so doing I should break my fast. At times I insisted that I should have food first; but my God-fearing mother, sometimes with love and sometimes with punishment, fixed this habit firmly in my mind, that I should first seek God and afterwards other things. Although, at that time, I was too young to appreciate the value of those things, yet later on I realized their value; and now, whenever I think of it, I thank God for that training, and I can never be sufficiently thankful to God for giving me such a mother, who in my earliest years instilled in me the love and fear of God."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Sadhu Sundar Singh, With and Without Christ, (Cassell & Co., London) p.90.



## 2. The Father

Brahman fathers of the old school teach their sons a little Sanskrit. Many who do not know Sanskrit themselves teach their sons a few Sanskrit slokas or prayers, especially the Gayatri, the most universal and sacred prayer in India. These prayers are repeated twice a day, even when the meanings are not accurately known. A certain religious effect is produced, however, by this recital of sacred words coming from the hoary past and sinking deeply into sentiment.

One of the most important functions of the father in a family is to perform the śrāddha ceremony - the offering of a ball of rice with water, milk, and honey to the ancestors. To this rite he invites the family relatives. These śrāddhas are necessary to enable the ancestors to retain their positions in heaven. Then, in turn, the welfare of the family is dependent on the welfare of the ancestors. If the ancestors fall from their estate the whole family will be destroyed. Grant these premises, and one can see what a tremendous pressure this puts upon early marriage and making sure of a male heir, who alone can continue these ceremonies.

## 3. The Household Shrine

In all the more conservative Hindu homes there is a family shrine provided with pictures of favorite deities and a number of clay, stone, or brass images. Here worship takes place daily, and before each meal the housewife, often accompanied by other members of the family, presents part of the food to the god. One should not idealize this household worship for, while sincere, it is often ignorant, and vague as to the actual function and nature of the idols.

## 4. Unconscious Influences

Popular Hinduism is not conveyed primarily through book learning. The Hindu acquires much of his religion quite unconsciously, for no religion in the world observes with such punctiliousness the innumerable details attendant upon every domestic event. Though the masses labor under a sense of grinding poverty yet, in order that fortune may be propitious, they must find time for the performance of certain social-religious ceremonies such as natal and ante-natal rites, the initiation of a youth when he dons for the first time the sacred thread, betrothals and marriages, daily rites including the early morning bath and those which surround the preparing and eating of every meal, and occasional rites such as on building or entering a new home, ploughing the first furrow, or bringing in the last sheaf of the harvest. The great majority observe such customs with a tenacity that seems surprising in these days. The young Hindu, then, is submerged in an atmosphere of religious rite which is almost unconsciously absorbed.

The child in an Indian household sees the oldest male doing puja for the whole family; he watches all the members of the household bow before the shrine; he wanders of his own accord into the temples and



unordered begins to imitate the worship there. He adopts the ritual without inquiring as to its meaning and may thus miss the finer side of Hindu thought.

Ahimsa, the supreme religious duty of non-killing, is embodied in the prevalent submission to the destruction of crops in distant fields by deer and peacocks, acquiescence to birds feasting on ripened grain, and to rats which infest village houses with no step toward extermination - very effective object lessons in religious education. The socio-religious attitude of caste is imbibed before a child can take its first steps. If, in an unguarded moment, a child of an upper caste runs the risk of pollution from one of the "sweeper" children he is snatched away by a big sister or brother. The minds of all are dyed in the law of the karma, and a child cannot help but catch a conviction of its grip upon all persons. It is practically impossible to grow up in India without learning something about Shiva, Vishnu, and other gods.

Thus a working knowledge of many of the outstanding doctrines and facts of Hinduism is absorbed without much direct discipline. However, it is by no means Hinduism at its highest that is thus received. Superstitions and none too helpful stories are more apt to be caught in this way.

## II. MINISTERS OF RELIGION

### 1. The Priest

There are numerous religious leaders in Hinduism. The priests are the hereditary guardians of its ritual and its social order. All priests are Brāhmans, though by no means all Brāhmans are priests. The Brāhman rarely acts as a spiritual guide, for he is essentially a priest and not a teacher. He is called in on numerous occasions such as examining the horoscope of the boy and girl who are to be married, cremations, deciding auspicious days for beginning ploughing, sowing, and reaping, painting the sacred marks of sect and caste upon the foreheads of the faithful, and sharing in ceremonies where other Brāhman priests preside, but where all Brāhmans are fed. If a family can afford it, it employs a Brāhman priest to look out for the religious interests of the family and to take charge of the domestic shrine. For not every priest has a temple, although every temple has at least one priest.

Priests are often lazy, ignorant, and very generally prey upon the gullability of the votaries. There are few to speak a good word for them. Fortunately for India there are better representatives of her religious life.

### 2. The Guru

The guru or religious teacher has had great respect throughout the whole history of India. They are of many kinds, from those deeply learned in scriptural lore and in the experience of life to those who appear to be ignorant charlatans.



The guru has followers both celibate and householders. The former live with him and receive instruction from him. The latter after initiation submit themselves to their spiritual preceptor, who either visits them in their respective villages, or receives their gifts at the headquarters of the order, where they listen to his teaching and admonition. Many careful fathers place their children under the care of such a professional religious teacher who may be continued through life as a kind of father-confessor. Especially is there need of a living guru if the disciple aspires to communion with the upper spheres during this life, the soul quitting the body temporarily. An adept, who has himself attained, must be available to teach the methods.

A guru's disciple, whether man or woman, is supposed to establish a permanent spiritual relation with his teacher, to whom obeisance as to one divine is often given. In most modern Hindu sects the disciple bows down before his guru and places some of the dust of the guru's feet upon his own head. In some cases he drinks the water in which the guru has washed his feet. While gurus are often linked with priests as reactionary and catering to the prejudices of the masses, the title guru retains from the past profound respect. These teachers of the better sort enlist exaggerated, almost passionate reverence. Their influence, however, is limited by the infrequency of their contact with disciples of the household - often only once a year and hence a notable event in quiet village life.

In the recent study of Christian Mass Movements in India it was stated that the survey had not disclosed a single group of mass movement converts that had indicated a belief that it could get along without a spiritual adviser. They have been accustomed to the idea of spiritual teachers in religion, but Christian evangelists do not come to them in the traditional guise of Indian religious mendicants. Furthermore they seem to come with financial backing. All of this militates against the systematic support of the new type on the initiative of converts.

### 3. Sannyasi and Sadhu

The sannyasi (renouncer) or sadhu (religious mendicant) contributes one of the most characteristic features of Indian religious life. The words apply to those who have renounced the world in order to devote their energies to the attainment of a higher goal. Included in their number are householders who by this renunciation of home, family, and possessions, have entered the fourth stage of an ideal life, and those who at whatever age have renounced the world in order to concentrate on conquering the flesh and purifying the soul. They typify to the people the ideal life which has cut itself loose from the ties of the world.

These "holy men" at their best consider all physical things as dross for the sake of inner discipline which is to free the soul from the world. True sannyasis do not retire to a monastery where food and shelter are assured, but wander homeless from place to place. They beg their meals, possess little more than their yellow robes, a few utensils, and their rosaries. "Non-attachment" to things is an outstanding virtue, leaving them free for the inner struggle,



This living protest against the soul's bondage to things is a constant reminder that poverty is not a disgrace, and is the crowning ideal for the devout Hindu. For nearly three thousand years the ascetics of India have stood forth as a witness to the supremacy of the spiritual. This object-lesson is one of the typical aspects of India.

Everything of the nature of social service or purposeful activity is absolutely foreign to the ideal of a sannyasi in great contrast to our western type of Christianity. In their effort to realize man's identity with Brahman, all action is conceived as enchaining; their aim is to be emancipated from the fruits of action. They are supposed no longer to desire wealth, position, children, and pleasure. Earthly things are not only empty and worthless, but entangle the soul in the net of birth and death. Hence they lay aside work of every kind for a wandering beggar's life.

This outwardly easy life has led great numbers of lazy and irreligious beggars to shelter themselves under the garb and privileges of the yellow robe. In fact, modern Hindus confess that the "holy men" are of little worth. Here and there can be found a sannyasi of real spirituality and beautiful character, and occasionally a man of education and distinction adopts this way of life, but the movement stands quite outside the activities agitating modern India.

The contrast between the utter simplicity of the sadhu's life and the comparative wealth of Christian leaders creates a difficulty for Christianity in India. Ever since de Nobile, the Jesuit, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, occasional experiments have been made by Christians to adopt the sadhu's way of life. Outstanding examples have been Bharani Charan Banerji, a Bengali Brāhman (b. 1861), and the late Sadhu Sundar Singh. It is inevitable that a type so characteristic of the religious life of India should be considered in developing an indigenous church. It would seem that the type must be considerably transformed before it can be congenial to the genius of Christianity.

#### 4. Bhagats

Another type of religious minister, found among the country districts throughout India, is the emotional devotee, known as Bhagat in north India. Unlike the sannyasis they remain within the Hindu social system performing the ordinary tasks assigned to the caste groups to which they belong. They are recognized as capable of acting as ambassadors to the spirit world, singing and dancing themselves into an ecstasy in which their bodies may be tortured without pain.

The villagers believe they have the power to appease certain deities, to destroy the effects from spells cast by evil spirits. Women with ailments resort to the Bhagat, or daughters-in-law who are childless go to them. Sickness in baby or in buffalo demands his exorcisms, and from a trance he sets the penances that must be paid. If an animal stops giving milk for no accountable reason, its owner consults a Bhagat. He is often



sincere in his belief that he is a chosen agent of the gods.

Others ministering to the felt needs of the people are medicine men, witch-finders, evil-averters, and devil-priests whose primitive shrines have a place of importance in the minds of the common people. The existence of such persons points toward the advisability of including medicine and animal husbandry in any effort at village service.

### III. RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

#### 1. Temples and Their Gods

Temples abound in India. Often they mark the spot where some theophany is supposed to have taken place, for the human heart is deeply touched by the idea that God has done something for His people. In the south enormous temples may be found, not so much single buildings as inclosures with gates, towers, and walls within which are tanks, halls, shrines, and temples. More typical are the smaller ones into which the people go one by one.

Still more common are the roadside shrines. One cannot go far along a highway without passing a pile of stones, or lingam, or image of Hunaman or Ganesh beneath some pipal tree. The tree itself may be sacred and the bits of paper or rags attached to its roots or branches betoken a simple trust in the accessibility of help in connection with these humble shrines.

#### 2. Monasteries

The monastic movement in India, during its early centuries, was undoubtedly of the greatest intellectual and religious force. But in modern times monasteries are not so much in evidence. A typical monastery consists of a large courtyard, containing several trees and possibly a temple or merely a platform on which are a lingam and a nandi bull. Cells with galleries looking in upon the court are on the four sides. The furnishings of the cells are simple in the extreme, consisting of a panther's skin or straw mat on the cement floor and a few Sanskrit books. A monk will rise between four and five in the morning, brush his teeth, and worship at the temple. Then much time is spent in study or, more likely, meditation on some mantra. The first and only meal of the day will be taken at noon. The afternoon is spent in prayers with the use of rosary and in study of some religious subject. By nine the day is over.

#### 3. Religious Festivals

Religious festivals form an important feature of the religious life of the people. The amours of Krishna are celebrated by immoral songs and pantomimes. At the spring festival the people give themselves up to a few days of rejoicing and pleasure. Bathing fairs usher in the cooler weather. These festivals are usually held on the banks of sacred rivers, where immense crowds press into the water with prayers to the special gods to whom they look for forgiveness and salvation.



For the children, especially, the journey to the festival is a time of pure enjoyment and delight. The whole family may journey together. The mother may have a vow to pay but the blend of holy man, harlequin, and other children make it a holiday for the younger folk.

These festivals might be likened to the saints' days of Christianity, except that gods take the place of saints, and mythological events the place of sacred memory. Unquestionably these festivals provide an escape from the monotonous burdens of the days. Christians must not overlook this means of bringing brightness and variety into the dull routine of Indian village life.

#### IV. RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

##### 1. Informal Worship

In previous sections a brief description has been given of the practice of private devotion, meditation, and prayer. Informal temple worship may go on all through the day. There is nothing corresponding to our congregational worship, but people drop in singly in a more or less constant stream depending on the popularity of the temple. A bell is rung on entrance, hands are washed, followed by bowing or prostration toward the shrine. Offerings of flowers, leaves, rice, or money may be placed before the images.

No priest is necessary in this informal worship; the individual, usually reverent and in earnest, silently brings his adoration and requests to the god. The prayer may consist of calling the god's name, repeating certain memorized sacred verses, and adding the personal petitions of the day. There is for these worshippers a very real satisfaction in being in the presence of their god, presenting their offerings to him without mediation, breathing their prayer directly, partaking of a portion of the food offered to their god, and going away with a sense of fortification against all evils.

In popular estimation the idols are not mere images, but each is the living god. With this premise, many a man who does not have much religious consciousness as a rule feels that in the presence of the idol he can adore and pray. It is a comfort to have a temple near one's home, for this means present and accessible gods. Thus the local temples minister to a powerful religious instinct.

On days of high festival the common people love to repair to some large temple in the region. But it is to the local deities that they turn in time of distress, for protection from disease, for the health of a loved one, or for blessings on the daily task. All too often for the villager, the unseen is peopled with unknown terrors and malevolent spirits. These must be appeased with gifts and propitiatory sacrifices.

An elaborate ritual could take up much of the day, but naturally few can carry out such a course. The faithful, however, will at least make their first thought on waking a prayer, and will observe the sacred bathings and a few other observances demanded by their sacred Dharma. In Hindu homes there is much of superstition, and religion often does not rise above pious performance; but to a marked degree it can be said that the Hindu of the older type is essentially religious. There is a constant recognition, at least in symbol, of a relationship to a supernatural world.



Idolatry is being laid aside by the educated. In fact, the judgment has been expressed that the great majority of Hindus going forth from modern schools and colleges from morning to night, and from year to year, never trouble themselves with the thought of God. All the greater is the need for a new spiritual force as vivid and available as idolatry itself.

To the Vedantist, Brahman is not an object of worship so much as a philosophic conception. Hence, logically, the Vedantist should not pray. The gayatri is repeated, but more as meditation than as prayer. Nevertheless, followers of higher Hinduism do pray and worship. For they recognize certain gods as manifestations of the unlimited Brahman.

## 2. Formal Worship

Brahmans officiate at formal worship (puja) in the temples. In most temples this takes place at least once each day. Every temple has from one to forty or more priests whose duty it is to perform the daily cult. Many of these priests hold their office by hereditary right.

In the larger temples the ceremony is complex and requires many priests. In its simplest form this temple worship consists in offering flowers, leaves, rice, and water to the various gods, with libations and appropriate intoning of mantras. Each day the idol must be awakened, bathed, dressed, fed, and put to sleep at night after the manner of the particular cult. As many as sixteen separate operations may be performed in such a ceremony. The worshippers watch the rite, share in the food, and wait for the climax - the darshan or auspicious sight of the god (idol) itself.

In the more elaborate services, people join with the priest at the temple. One can scarcely go out in the morning or evening in a large Indian city without hearing the sound of temple gongs and drums. If one stops outside the door the sound of hymns and chanting may be heard, as the priest makes the offerings of rice and Ganges water. The puja ends with noisy crash and waving of lamps before the god, after which the offerings and holy water may be distributed so that each worshipper may take a little home with him.

In South India there is a common practice of taking the god out for a ride. For this purpose temples keep great cars with large wheels, so that scores of men are required to draw them through the streets.

In all that has been said, especially in connection with the wayside shrines, one should be on one's guard against reading into the word "worship" all that this word means to us.

## 3. Offerings

Regular, systematic, proportional giving is not practiced, but incidental fees and gifts mount up to a considerable sum. For all the services to the family, the priest must be given a fee. At a wedding, or festival, or on any other religious occasion, gifts must be presented to Brahmans and no act of merit is supposed to yield so rich a reward as feeding the Brahmans. Liberal fees are paid to the priests for the privilege of entering the inner courts and laying offerings before the sacred image. The ever-present holy man, also,



must receive his alms. Sacred Brāhmani bulls, set at large as an act of religious merit, wander through the fields grazing freely on the best.

The offerings to the gods usually consist, as we have seen, of flowers, leaves, rice, and water, although in Kali worship goats are sacrificed. The larger temples are often endowed, possessing large tracts of land from the income of which the priests are supported and the expenses of the temple met.

The authors of Behind Mud Walls, after a five years' intimate acquaintance with a north India village, put words into the mouth of a villager from which we can catch an insight into certain ways in which Hinduism is supported: "The men who devote their lives to priestly duties visit us, to be sure. But they come with a conch or a bell, the sound of which sends our women folk scuttling to the grain jars. At our doors they stop just long enough to have the donations poured into their bags. And when the bags are full they move on. They tell us that the grain is for the temple on the edge of town, or for one on the Ganges. We do not stop to inquire further. They are priests, and we have always given. Sometimes a priest comes to recite verses. But he only does it in the house where the feast is prepared and his pay is promised; or a wandering priest comes by, and stops with us. We gladly give him food and shelter. But if he possesses great wisdom, he does not share it. How long did our Sadhu stay with us, collecting grain until he had so much he needed a store-house to keep it in? Was it two years or more? His pony grazed in our fields, and his cart and his family lived under Jonak's big tree. His wife could get our women to give her a nything because she was proud and scornful, and they were innocent of pride. He used to read to us occasionally from the sacred books. And then how swiftly he moved on when that youth came from Etah and recognized him and the woman who had been pretending to be his wife. Since that experience we have been more wary. But we have been taught to honor our priests,"<sup>2</sup>

The Hindu idea of giving to gain merit is general, and leads many to think of Christian missions as a plan by which foreign supporters gain much credit for the future.

#### 4. Pilgrimage

The hills and plains of India are furrowed by the feet of innumerable pilgrims who journey far and endure much hardship in order to visit some favorite shrine. Literally thousands of men and women from the humblest to the more prosperous classes leave their homes and work to make the long, leisurely journeys to some great place of pilgrimage. Fairs and festivals on the way are visited and a halt may be made at a monastery or an ashram. As they pass from village to village for many days in their long pilgrimage one may hear the beating of cymbals or the chanting of some hymn. When, at last, they reach the journey's end and are vouchsafed a Darshan or vision of their god, it is a rapturous experience.

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2. C.V. and W.H. Wiser, Behind Mud Walls, (Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1930) p. 164-165.



Often pilgrims journey in bands or family groups, fulfilling the aspiration of a lifetime. The pilgrim may combine business as well as pleasure with his religious duties - the farmer attends cattle marts and makes his annual purchases, while the women and children haunt the little booths and shops where they purchase trinkets and toys for their friends and relatives. Who could be so bold as to measure the degree of spiritual devotion which fills their hearts?

Some effort has been made to incorporate the Indian passion for pilgrimage into the Christian system. In some areas Christian villagers with banners, flags, and bands walk in to the central church where the darshan is the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

#### 5. Memorization

Indians are reputed to have good memories. Possibly the prevalent illiteracy has developed this faculty. At any rate, many devout Hindus can repeat great portions of their sacred scriptures. Sadhu Sandar Singh tells us, for example, that when he was seven years of age he had learned by heart that famous Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita. Hence, instead of the western sermon, some Christian leaders have encouraged the memorization and recital of the great Biblical stories and the best of Christian hymns.

#### 6. Song Fests

Indians love music and will sit patiently and attentively long through the night if a singer or musician is in their midst. In the summer evenings, after sunset, groups of men gather at their favorite haunts - the porch of a neighbor's house or near the village well. There they may be found sitting cross-legged on the ground or on mats, listening to a local singer or to a wandering bard.

Much of the power of popular Hinduism is conveyed in this way through the vernacular hymns of the poet-saints which deeply touch the emotions of the plain man. These songs are carried in the hearts of the people, and the unlettered sing them on the road to market or when ploughing in the field. The Tamil Saivite hymns and the village hymns of the Bhakti saints have given myriads of humble people comfort and support in hours of difficulty, failure, and penitence over shortcomings. Plain man and scholar, alike, are deeply indebted to these psalms. No one who has heard the fervor with which these psalms are sung to the accompaniment of snapping of fingers, clapping of hands, and swayings to and fro, fails to recognize their hold on the religious lives of the people.

Large groups are stirred with religious devotion in what are called Kirtans or bhajan parties. Such festivals of song fulfill for the villages somewhat the same function as the church choir or sacred concert in the West. In the latter, however, the same high expectation, the tears of rapture, and the night-long absorption in the music are not present. Fortunately, Indian Christianity has had its Narayan Baman Tilak and its Krishna Pillai and the church has its Christian hymns fresh from devout spirits close to the life and traditions of the people. But still greater use could be made of this means by which the saints of Hinduism laid hold of the hearts of the masses.



## 7. Yoga

India has developed a system of mental and physical culture called Yoga which has been much practised by Hindu men of religion. It comprises a series of movements and pauses, related to the body and mind, having a spiritual purpose in view. The object is to attain a rhythm and concentration, and out of this a stillness. The outward body and the conscious mind may be rendered quiescent in this manner, with the expectation that the subconscious mind will become actively awake. These methods seem to be congenial to the Hindu temperament for they have been continued for generations. For some, these psycho-physical exercises are merely a kind of self-hypnosis or trance; for the more spiritual they are part of a truly religious experience.

For the most part Indian Christianity has shrunk from the use of Yoga - and there are good reasons for being cautious. But in recent years there have been a few sincere and earnest Indian Christians who have attempted to acclimatize in their own practice of Christianity the best in the Yoga systems. B.C. Sircar in his shrine at Puri practices a Christian Yoga. Sadhu Sundar Singh's whole conception of prayer and of silent waiting on the Divine Spirit was influenced by his early training from a devout Hindu sannyasin. G. S. Appasamy, in a pamphlet Yoga and Prayer, explains what yoga in a Christian form would be.

## 8. Asceticism

The Hindu doctrine of life, as a condition in which every action good or ill binds the doer to the endless round of birth and death so that the sole method of escape is through absorption of the self in the Absolute, inevitably leads to asceticism. Hence through the centuries renunciation of the world has marked the religious life of India. A brief description of the life and practice of the sannyasi and sadhu has already been given. Here we will only add that the Protestant western world and Indian Christianity following it, have abjured asceticism.

# V. OTHER MEANS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

## 1. Professional Readers and Story Tellers

Two of the favorite religious books of India are the Bhagavad Gita and Tulsi Das's Ramayana. Those who learn to read may dip into these, or at night the village headman may read aloud. On rare occasions a professional reader may visit the village and open a sacred book. The reading and expounding of Puranas by skilled Brahmins takes place in many temples and this exercise attracts large audiences.

Even though India is not literate knowledge of their greater heroes and heroines is quite general. One means is through stories told by the mother, or grandmother, or by the occasional professional story-teller who wanders into a village to hold the people spellbound through most of the night. In this way they hear the story of Rama and Sita and catch therefrom ideals of patience, devotion, and endurance. Listening to old legends or religious tales, as these are expounded in temple or home, has been a marked feature of India's religious culture.



## 2. Symbolism

Symbolism plays a large part in Hinduism. Through the centuries spiritual sentiment has gathered round the many objects and idols of this protean religion. It is exceedingly difficult for one from the West to sympathize with these symbols, which in many cases appear tawdry and crude, and the common people, themselves, may only vaguely understand their meaning. Yet these symbols are carriers of religion for the masses. The many-armed Ashtabhuji suggests the enfolding arms of the Divine. The lingam, commonest of religious objects in India, does not seem to convey any sexual suggestion but, in so far as worshippers give a meaning to it at all, stands for an incarnation of Maha dev. The popular picture of Krishna playing the flute stands for the divine activity which is always play. Even figures of Kali - horrible to most Westerners - carry some idea of cosmic force and in a peculiar way attract multitudes of Indians. In appraising the means by which Hinduism is mediated to its adherents and its power over them maintained one cannot wisely neglect the great importance of symbolism.

## 3. Explicit Teaching

There are still to be found old-fashioned Sanskrit schools in each of which some learned monk teaches Sanskrit to a group of boys, or expounds the Vedanta to older students. There are certain larger schools, founded by reformers in the last few decades, where children receive a modern education including instruction in the Hindu religion. It has been estimated, however, that less than one per cent. of Hindu youth receive explicit systematic religious teaching. There are several Hindu colleges where emphasis is placed on religious training. At the Gurukula, at Hardwar, under the Arya Samaj, boys are admitted at the age of seven, and take a vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience for sixteen years. During this long period of training, the pupils are not permitted to visit their homes.

## VI. CONCLUSION

We have seen how Hinduism attempts to turn every ordinary duty of life into a religious function, and at how many points it tries to minister to the needs, longings, and spiritual necessities of its votaries. Popular Hinduism is not mediated mainly through books nor through systematic instruction, but by more informal though effective means as far as cult is concerned. The more serious religious leaders receive training in intimate association with some Guru who directs their reading and meditation. There are places where definite training for the priesthood is given. Christian leaders might profit, not so much from a study of religious training in Hinduism, as in a sympathetic insight into the manifold and pervasive ways in which an attempt is made to meet human needs through the medium of religion.







